

MEMORABLE WORDS OF LIFE FOR EVERYONE TRYING TO LEAD THE GOOD LIFE

FR. FRANCIS ACHARYA OCSO

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KURISUMALA
ASHRAM

Monastery of Our Lady of Kurisumala

Memorable Words of Life For Everyone Trying to Lead the Good Life

**By
Fr. Francis Acharya OCSO**

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May the Holy Spirit enlighten and guide you

Fr. Ugo-Maria Ginex
Editor.
St. Mary's Hermitage Press

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**MESSAGE FROM THE ABBOT
OF KURISUMALA ASHRAM**



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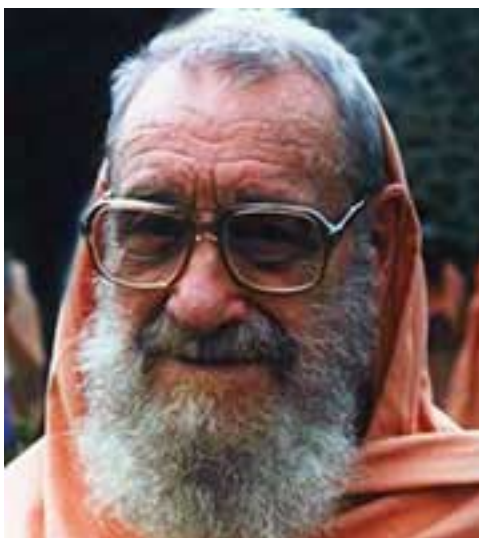
To the Editor,
Fr. Ugo-Maria Ginex E.S.B.,
St. Mary's Hermitage Press
Canterbury. Kent.

When one thinks of Kurisumala Ashram (Cistercian Abbey), it is naturally about its founder Abbot Francis Acharya, the Syrian Liturgy, The Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit, the Cistercian Spirituality and the Indian Sannyasa lifestyle that comes to one's mind. We, the monks of Kurisumala, try to live this spirit by imbibing our tradition and transmitting it to the coming generations.

Your intervention with the intention of spreading his thoughts and words through this attempt is God's plan too, and may the Good Lord bless you for your kind efforts.

With best wishes,
Fr. Sevanand O.C.S.O.
Kurisumala Ashram,
October 12, 2018.

THE AUTHOR



Fr. FRANCIS ACHARYA OCSO

(17.01.1912 - † 31.01.2002)

Founder

FRANCIS ACHARYA THE KARMAYOGI OF KURISUMALA

Francis Acharya, well-known in India monastic circles as one of the forerunners of the Christian Ashram Movement, crossed over to the Promised Land on January 31, 2002. His life, a saga which began on the 17th of January, 1912, in Belgium, the land of Missionaries, came to an end in India, the abode of Maharshis. He was ninety, “Our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong” says the psalmist (Ps. 90:10). “Ninety for those who are stronger,” one is tempted to add! A true Indian sannyasi with a multi-faceted personality, he was “still bearing fruit when old, still full of sap, still green” (Ps. 92:14).

EARLY DAYS AND VOCATION

John Mahieu (who, in time, became Francis Acharya) was the fifth son of a prosperous farmer. After schooling and business studies at Brussels, divine providence brought him to London. While

there, his latent spiritual senses were awakened and captivated by Gandhiji, the so-called “half-naked fakir,” who had arrived there for the round-table conference. The Mahatma’s apparent holiness and commitment to personal values struck a chord in John’s heart, a chord which was but a foreshadowing of the spiritual symphony which would soon follow.

John served in the Belgian army from 1932 to ’33, when the Finger of the Lord beckoned him to His ranks to fight a new kind of warfare, an unseen and interior one this time. He left the army after a period of profound pondering, entered the Trappist (Cistercian) monastery of Our Lady of Scourmont at Chimay, Belgium, taking the name Francis. He had chosen that particular monastery because its Abbot, Dom Anselm le Bail, a reformer and visionary in his own right, was planning to establish a foundation in India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi. He served as novice-master there from 1946 to ’49 and later at Caldey Abbey in Great Britain. Scourmont later dropped its plans for an Indian foundation and after twenty years as a Trappist monk and priest with degrees from Rome, Louvain and Paris under his belt, Fr. Francis found himself alone as he set sail for India to join two like-minded Frenchmen. These were Henri le Saux (Swamy Abhishiktananda), a Benedictine monk and Fr. Jules Monchanin (Swamy Paramarubi Ananda), a missionary priest. They had already founded Saccidanada Ashram (Shantivanam) near Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu.

KURISUMALA ASHRAM

The months immediately following Fr. Francis’ landing at Bombay in July 1955 were pilgrim days for him as he traversed

the length and breadth of India, assimilating the culture and traditions of this ‘cradle of monasticism’. His stay at Shantivanam with its founders lasted a year. Following an invitation by Zacharias Mar Athanasius, then Bishop of Tiruvalla diocese in Kerala, he soon decided to sink roots there. On March 21, 1958 he established Kurisumala Ashram (the ‘Syrian Shantivanam,’ as Fr. Monchanin put it) near Vagamon, Kerala, in the company of Fr. Bede Griffiths, well-known Benedictine monk, and a couple of aspirants.

Their lifestyle during the first days at Kurisumala was rigorous and simple in the extreme. Whatever the essential commodities they lacked, water was certainly not one of them! Monsoon rains lashed the mountainside with such fury that they soon realized the inadequacy of their thatched hut in checking the onslaught of humidity and the need of a stone building. Fr. Francis loved to recall how their primitive living conditions had brought tears to the eyes of their visiting Bishop who once actually told them: “If I were free, I’d immediately join you!”

Enveloped by the elements in the shadow of the cross, this small nucleus grew into a koinonia of fifteen in three years under the watchful eyes of Fr. Francis who was their father, mother, confidant and guru. Of the scenic beauty of Kurisumala’s surroundings, he wrote:

***This joyous site of rocks and hills,
The sparkling jewels of the highlands of Kerala,
A land of grassy slopes with flowers of many hues,
With glades where fair trees dance in the wind...***

By dint of back-breaking labour which is the lot of pioneers, they transformed this beautiful but infertile tract of land into a

veritable paradise of green pastures, flower-gardens, and vegetable beds. Acharya's search for a livelihood and his concern for the welfare of the needy people nearby led to the establishment of Kurisumala dairy farm. This agricultural development and cattle-breeding facilities soon gave Kurisumala the image of the promised land to many. Their daily life was woven out of three distinctive strands:

Syrian Liturgy: An oriental and essentially poetic liturgy deeply rooted in the thought and language of the Bible, with a vivid sense of the resurrection.

Indian Monastic Lifestyle: Inculturated, simple, nature-oriented and austere.

Benedictine-Cistercian Spirituality: Based on the Rule of Saint Benedict with its emphasis on community prayer, manual labour and Lectio Divina (meditative, prayerful spiritual reading).

Modelling their life on the early Church of Jerusalem, they lived the common life to the hilt, sharing living quarters, basic amenities and goods. Prayer services were initially in Syriac. Fr. Francis, driven by the typical Cistercian search for authenticity, traveled all the way to Iraq and managed to procure original Syriac prayers of the Antiochean rite (the Penqito). By a Herculean effort spanning nearly two decades, he translated selected portions into four volumes totalling 2300 pages, named Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit. "...He has freely used his sources with striking effect, reflecting the Christian freedom and creative genius of the great masters of liturgical prayer in the past" wrote *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* of the Pontifical Oriental Institute. Rome, praising the first of this quartet, adorned as it is with 'seeds of the word' gleaned from the spiritual heritage of India. A book of daily readings on the Lives and Saying of Saints

from different religious traditions, a lectionary with commentary for the liturgical feasts of the year, a translation of the Ritual of the Clothing of Monks in the Syrian tradition and some other unpublished works were also born of his fecund pen. Besides these, he took active interest and published Malayalam translations of those gems of Eastern Christian monastic spirituality, *The Philokalia* and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

Immersed in the regular monastic milieu of prayer, work, and spiritual reading, this small band of sadhakas, brahmacharis and sannyasis continued to cross milestones: Fr. Francis' Indian citizenship, Fr. Bede's departure to Shantivanam as its superior, Fr. Francis' Shashtiabdapurthi and his taking up the title of "Acharya," introduction of the Bharatiya Pooja... Ever the able and concerned Captain, he piloted Kurisumala Ashram back to the Cistercian shore towards the end of his earthly voyage, and it was thus that Kurisumala was incorporated "as it is" into the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance in July 1998, with the status of Abbey. The title of 'Abbot' was conferred on him a year later, just before the Cistercian General Chapter at Lourdes, where he was the doyen—and the babe, in another sense! Little wonder, then that his twilight days were brightened by an ever-radiant face that spoke volumes of his inner joy and contentment of having run a good race. When a heart-failure transported him from time to eternity, the first words he heard must surely have been, "Well done, good and faithful servant..."

His body was transferred to Pushpagiri Hospital, Tiruvalla, where it was on display for four days in a glass-sided mortuary, only a stone's throw away from the Bishop's home where he and Fr. Bede had begun their lives as sannyasis before setting out for

Kurisumala. Another remarkable coincidence was the location of the former pilgrimage shrine at the Ashram where his mortal remains were finally laid to rest—it was right next to the site where they had set up their first hut and began life at Kurisumala. These curious coincidences of beginning and ending at the same place—could they perhaps be signs that he did return straight to the embrace of the Heavenly Father from where he began his earthly pilgrimage?

FRANCIS ACHARYA THE MAN

Fr. Francis Acharya was a man whose personality had many sides to it. A man of short stature but a giant in his faith and resolve, he rubbed shoulders with patriarchs to peasants, and became “all things to all people” in a real sense. He was a loving son to his parents, a genuine monk to his fellow cenobites, a man of verve and vision to his contemporaries, a spiritual father par excellence to his sons at Kurisumala and many others, a gracious host to all who visited his Ashram, an unsung up-lifter of the poor in Vagamon, a true Gandhian to all Indians, an inspiration to many and, it must be admitted, a thorn in the flesh to some. His strict and unyielding ways occasionally rubbed people the wrong way, especially during his early days at Kurisumala. Sometimes it was misunderstanding that caused problems. “It is puzzling to see how the best intentions, how works of dedication almost invariably arouse suspicions and opposition in one’s own circles and in other circles” said Fr. Francis once during an interview. The Lord, in course of time, smoothened the rough edges of His chosen instrument on the grindstone of adversities and physical sufferings, so that sweetness and charm emanated from him towards the end, with only an occasional overcast to remind others of his garam masaala days. “Father Francis yesterday and Father Francis today are as far apart as night and day” was how a senior Sannyasi put it. And so it was with heavy hearts and brimming eyes that the brothers of Kurisumala gathered around the death-bed of their beloved Father, realising that he had come

a full circle: from quick-tempered to serene, from demanding to understanding, from stubborn to docile.

He is no longer with us in the flesh and blood, but his spirit lives on in the living tradition of Kurisumala Ashram, in the daily celebrations from Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit and in the hearts of the poor folk of Vagamon in a special way.



Ashram at Night

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE MONASTERY OF OUR LADY OF KURISUMALA ASHRAM

“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I’ll show you” (Gen. 12:1). The proximate reason for the establishment of Kurisumala Ashram was John Mahieu’s (later Francis Acharya) response to this divine call. Though a Belgium by birth, the seeds of his vocation, which culminated in the oblation of his life at Kurisumala as a true Indian, were sown by none other than the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi. This took place during the days of the round-table conference in London, where John was a student at that time.

After making profession at the Cistercian (Trappist) monastery in Scourmont, Belgium, he followed a persistent call to India and set foot in this “cradle of monasticism” in 1955. After an extensive ‘stay-and-study’ at major Indian Ashrams, he had a short stay with the founders of Saccidanandaj Ashram (Shantivanam) in Tiruchirappalli. Eventually, he accepted the invitation of Zacharias Mar Athanasios, the then Bishop of the Syro-Malankara Diocese of Tiruvalla, and officially established Kurisumala Ashram near Vagamon on March 21, 1958, in the company of Fr. Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk, and a couple of aspirants.

Enveloped by the elements in the shadow of the cross, this small nucleus grew into a koinonia of fifteen in three years under the watchful eyes of Fr. Francis who was their father, mother, confidant and guru.

These pioneers of Kurisumala Ashram bent their backs and shed the sweat of their brows and soon turned this beautiful but infertile tract of land into a veritable paradise of green pastures, flower gardens, and vegetable beds. Stone barriers were raised to protect crops and conserve soil, trees were planted, terraces built, dams constructed, the face of the earth was renewed... In the course of time, simple stone buildings were erected for the church, living quarters and guest-houses. A herd of cows was raised from scratch and soon a dairy farm was operational, and it served the dual purpose of providing a livelihood for the community and supporting the poor families nearby. Within ten years, this agricultural development and the establishment of a cattle-breeding center gave it an image of the Promised Land for many, a land flowing with milk and honey...

Immersed in the regular monastic milieu of prayer, work and spiritual reading, this small band of sadhakas, brahmacharis and sannyasis continued to cross milestones: Fr. Francis' Indian citizenship, Fr. Bede's departure to Shantivanam as its superior, Fr. Francis' shashtiabdapurthi and his taking of the title of Acharya, introduction of the Bharatiya Pooja,... In 1998, the Ashram was incorporated into the Order of the Cistercians of Strict Observance (a world-wide contemplative order with its Generalate in Rome) with the status of an autonomous Abbey. The Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia 'adopted' Kurisumala as its daughter-house.

Fr. Francis Acharya, who was blessed as Abbot in 1999, passed away on January 31, 2002, and Fr. Yesudas Thelliyil was blessed as the second Abbot of Kurisumala on March 20, 2002.

An important moment of Kurisumala Ashram's history—the 50th anniversary of foundation—was completed and celebrated on January 31st, 2008.

Having completed 75 years of age, with 12 years in the Abbatial ministry, Fr. Yesudas resigned. Fr. Ishanand was blessed as our third Abbot on April 7, 2014.

Trusting in the grace of God and the intercession of many here and above, especially that of Our Lady, we look with eyes of hope towards the future.





KURISUMALA
ASHRAM

Monastery of Our Lady of Kurisumala

MEMORABLE WORDS OF LIFE

FOR EVERYONE TRYING TO LEAD THE GOOD LIFE

EVERYDAY LIFE



Awareness as a spiritual quality is more important than consciousness.



I am still learning to revere everything and everybody.



Do everything you do well, without considering your personal likes or dislikes.



Put your heart into your daily duties, do them with peace and joy, and not mechanically.



Don't let the temptation of boredom (acedia) grow in you. The remedy to boredom is to put your heart into whatever you do and find joy in it.



The ancient rishis of India used to follow the natural cycles of morning and evening for their prayer. Now, electricity has changed night into day, and caused the words 'morning' and 'evening' to lose their meaning. This is the result of science without wisdom.



Being receptive to the Word of God that comes to us through everyday events is real contemplation.

CREATION



We should make a place for the creation in our prayers.



Somebody living in a multi-storeyed apartment may be excused for not praising the Lord looking at the creation. But we, on this mountain, should draw dear to God through creation.



The Psalmist praises God who planted the cedars of Lebanon. If he had been in Kerala, he'd have spoken of coconut trees and cardamon plants. (Psalm 104:16)



The universal vocation of creation and human beings is to praise God.



We are representatives of the creation (which cannot speak) in praising God.



Natural calamities are not God's punishment, as some think. If they were, the world would have been destroyed long, long ago!

OUR RELATIONSHIP IN THE WORLD



Looking at others' faults stunts our growth.



One of the most important acts of fraternal love is to bring out in others the capacity to love.



We need not be blind to others' faults. Instead, be merciful.



Our love must be universal and total, but it must be ordered according to the recipient's relationship with us.



Be enthusiastic about finding good in others.



High walls which keep out the poor are not evangelical.



We are part of a world community, like a single cell in a honeycomb.

WORLDLINESS



These days, people have lost a sense of Mystery.



Don't let your interior life be ruled by mere human reason.



Nowadays, the world is converting us Christians to its spirit, rather than we converting it to the Spirit of God.



In order to 'work with God for the removal of evil' (Gandhiji), we must renounce all that displeases Him: exploitation, corruption, permissiveness, and so on.



The 'litmus test' of poverty is detachment to things.



Consumerism, pleasure-seeking and a life of permissivity and perversity are poisons spreading through the world.



Do not let our hearts go corrupt. Only corrupt things come from a corrupt heart.



The Church is better organised than the United Nations, but has scarcely produced the fruits it should have.

GRACE AND BEING CALLED



We should each discern our personal charism.



We should share with others the gifts we receive, and depend on Providence and work for our livelihood.



The source of all energy is the Holy Spirit and not the atom bomb!



In every vocation, we must develop the awareness that the Holy Spirit should be at the root of our lives and behind our words and deeds.



‘Drawing near to God’ is a difficult task for which special grace is indispensable.



Divine love frees us from the elements of appropriation and personal satisfaction which characterise worldly love.



When we get discouraged by our lack of progress, we should remember that our transformation into the likeness of Jesus is God’s work in us.



‘Vocation’ means dwelling in the tent of God like Moses.



The ‘rock’ is the faith that Christ has called me, not confidence in my abilities or qualifications. (Gospel of Matthew 7:24-25)



A religious vocation is always in response to an aspiration, a thirst, a search for God.



Contemplation is not reached by our own efforts. St. Paul did not ‘climb’ to the third heaven; he was ‘caught up’ to it.



God’s love and human infidelity are part of a cycle that repeats itself in the Divine-human relationship.



DETACHMENT AND GIFT OF SELF



Keep asking yourself: “Am I making enough of a self-gift?”



There is always a danger that activities and zeal may be used for self-glorification.



When your rhythm of life does not facilitate fidelity to prayer, offer to the Lord your inner unfulfilled desire to be with Him ‘for better and for worse’.



Detachment from money adds value to our lives.



All our renunciations are interior.



A VIRTUOUS LIFE



Even in our life in the Spirit, we should not always expect ourselves to be like athletes ready to break records; rather, we should accept our frailties with equanimity.



The moral values depend also on our effort; but because we can do nothing without God, they too may be called theological, in a way.



Self-control exercised without discernment results in introversion. Temper self-control with self-gift.



Humility is the hard road that leads to truth.



Commandments are external while charism is internal. There exists a tension between the two.



Purification of the memory, rectification of the reason and unification of the will are necessary for Divine union.



Chastity is loving others with a love transfigured by an intense love for Christ.

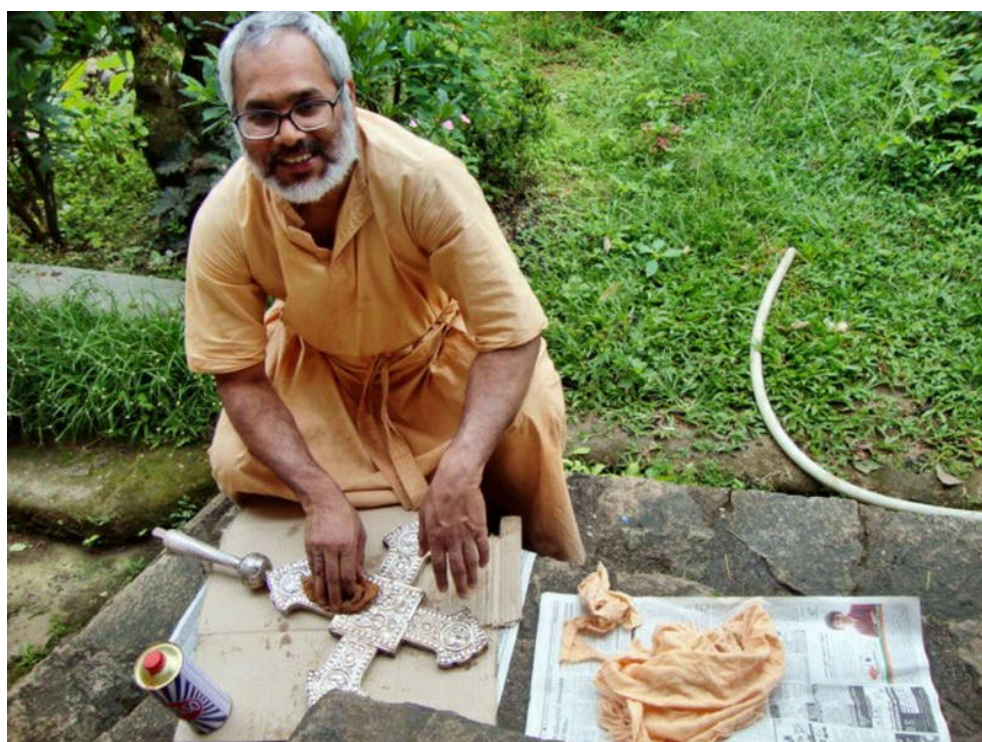


Virtue begins at keeping the commandments and progresses towards the beatitudes.



It is by labour, sweat and tears that we draw near to God.

🌸 If we don't assimilate what is said, even the best preacher becomes ineffective.



OBEDIENCE AND ACCEPTANCE



The beginning of the mystical life in us begins with the realisation that all our previous sufferings were actually times of blessings.



We should learn and accept the alternation of trials and blessings in our life, and not wait only for blessings.



The labour of obedience, similar to the labor of childbirth, involves our whole being because of the opposition of our self-will.



Do not despair. Put your trust in God that He may pull you up and move you onwards by favourable winds.



When darkness falls upon us (as when the electricity fails), we have to stop and perhaps re-orient ourselves.



Obedience is a battle; it may also be called a weapon. Sadly, the nobility of weapons has been lost because of today's missiles.



Suffering is the manure and water necessary for a good harvest.



Obedience is a delicate virtue by nature, but very powerful in practice.



Self-control is the narrow gate through which we enter the way of life.



Constant struggle is necessary to maintain the fruits of the Spirit in us.



An intelligent head on a sickly body is no good. We should transcend our weaknesses and rise to the quality of the Head, Christ.



Baptism may be called a 'branding' to indicate that we belong to the flock of Jesus.



Even when we recite a lot of prayers, we are not praying if we do our own will.



Harmony is a result of surrender.



REPENTANCE, CONVERSION AND FORGIVENESS



Repentance is complete only when compunction is accompanied by a turning back to God.



One who accepts their faults and begs for forgiveness is enlightened.



‘Spiritual unhappiness’ is the first step of conversion.



Conversion is the return from a life of the flesh to a life of the Spirit.



Even small things like a holy picture or a crucifix are sufficient to germinate, revive and nourish our earnestness for conversion.



To get our brokenness healed, we must first of all acknowledge our brokenness.



We have been given a longer life than, say, St. Therèse of Lisieux, or Blessed Maria Gabriella so that we may repent.



Even examination of conscience has degraded to the state of a judge condemning a person based on a set of laws. We should pay more attention to the Spirit.



Compunction is like a painful but beneficial ‘spiritual injection’.



There is a fruitful distress and a sterile distress.
The agony of Christ in Gethsemane is the
most glorious expression of fruitful distress.



HUMILITY AND OUR NATURE



We ought to learn to distinguish truth from untruth by meditation and thus to eliminate untruth. As we progress in self-awareness, we discover more and more traces of untruth in us, which we should continue to eliminate by self-discipline.



We have to learn from the mistakes of the disciples who failed to understand Jesus' suffering. ...When we have to face things against our nature, we must pray for God's grace to overcome our nature.



When we accept our shortcomings, we enjoy a special kind of peace.



We are icons fixed to a piece of wood, which is God, by the gum which is God's law. This bond is a mystery.



To enter 'God's rest' * describes the state of a life in God. This state is 'restful' because, when we are in God, there is no struggle with our broken selves. (* *St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 4:10*)



The beatitudes are like multi-coloured flowers produced by humility.

DEATH IS NOT...



Death is a 'passover' to the real life.



When someone dies, our expectation of 'meeting again' should be stronger than our sorrow. Actually, they don't 'pass away' but 'pass over'.



TRANSFORMED LIFE



If love is a vase, compassion, forgiveness, kindness etc. are the flowers in it.



The state of one heart and one mind is the fruit of prayer.



Today, there is a lot of talking and teaching, but living is what counts. It attracts and touches people.



The rose spreads its scent without speaking. So does true spirituality communicate itself.



Jesus' disciples were not perfect, but their mission transformed them. So it is with us.



There may be good techniques in other religions, but remember that they are only means and not ends in themselves.



It is more important to be a saint than be canonised as one.



It is one's spirit which enables one to be united with God.



Every person has the vocation to draw near to God. In this sense, the monastic vocation is the human vocation.



The life in Christ is a life over which the spirit of God is hovering, just as He did over the

chaos and made it orderly. (Book of Genesis 1:1)



A mystic is above a theologian and closer to God than an evangelist.



When we sin, we do it not only against God, but also against ourselves, because we have a Divine nature.



‘Righteousness’ is more concerned with the law whereas ‘truthfulness’ has more to do with the heart.



Mindfulness or awareness of the presence of God leads to a seriousness of life, a life without compromise. This seriousness gives rise to an effort of mind and heart to remain in His presence. This effort produces a transformation of thought where everything is associated with the Divine.

Word AND WORD



To receive the Word of God profitably, we must don the 'earphones of silence'.



Words, though helpful in expressing our feelings towards a person, are also a hindrance in doing so. Thus, being with a person in silence could be a sign of a deeper relation with that person.



Spiritual reading causes the seeds of goodness in us to germinate.



Let us live the Gospel.



The Word of God should enter your hearts, not just your heads.



Chew (meditate on) your food (the Word of God) and send it to your stomach (heart).



The most sublime task of the reason is to listen to God's Word and accept it by faith.

INCULTURATION AND INCARNATION



Externals are not enough. Christianity has to 'put on' (as St. Paul says) the Indian and Asian spirit.



Inculturation is not a matter primarily of behaviour. It is an interior disposition and attitude.



'Incarnation' is better and stronger than 'inculturation'; it is what Jesus did. We must incarnate the spirit of the Gospel in India by inculturation.



PRAYER IN OUR COMMUNITIES



We can't become angels, but we can imitate them in praising God unceasingly.



Do not separate prayer and doctrine.



The heavenly liturgy is actuated in us by the liturgy of the Church 'in anticipation'.



The prayer of the Church actuates the Redemptive Mysteries, just as the generator gives electricity to a bulb.



The heart of the life of the Church is the celebration of the Economy of Salvation.



The word of God 'penetrates between soul and spirit', * not to separate them but to make them work hand in hand. (* *St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 4:12*)



The prayer of the Church alternates between speaking to God and listening to God.



We should pray for the restoration of the sense of Sunday as the Lord's day.



In my opinion, the theology found in the prayer of the Church is even deeper than what is taught in seminaries.

MARY, OUR...



The most beautiful name of Mary is ‘Mother of God’.



St. Ephrem calls Mary ‘prophetess’. Such an address is not to be found even in the Litany of Loretto.



JESUS THE CHRIST



Jesus must be our best friend.



Each of us should find a balance between brotherly love and intimacy with Jesus.



The trend these days is to associate with intellectuals and people of high profile. Remember that Jesus involved himself with sinners and the poor.



Our model is Jesus who did not bother about ‘human rights’ but obeyed unto death.



If a baby stops growing in a mother’s womb, it is considered as a miscarriage. If Jesus stops growing in us, it is a ‘spiritual miscarriage’. If this happens, we can no longer find joy in service or self-giving.



The cup which the Master drank to the dregs is also to be drunk by us sooner or later, more often or more rarely according to the itinerary of our pilgrimage. It remains for us not to allow our hearts to sink in anger or revolt.



Problems among the Churches start within peoples’ hearts, when they don’t feel that they are also part of the Body of Christ.



The devotion to the name is very fruitful for bhaktas*. The name of Jesus is a bridge death and life. It is also a bridge between the children of the Father. (*=*devotees. Ed*)





KURISUMALA
ASHRAM

Monastery of Our Lady of Kurisumala

**ESPECIALLY APPLYING
TO MONKS**

FROM THE OUTSIDE, LOOKING IN



The monastery is a paradise for visitors, but it is also a desert where the food is manna and water is from the rocks in the desert.



Monasteries should be islands of peace.



There are many who take care of physically dying people. Contemplatives should take care of spiritually dying people.



CREATION



We should make a place for the creation in our prayers.



Somebody living in a multi-storeyed apartment may be excused for not praising the Lord looking at the creation. But we, on this mountain, should draw dear to God through creation.



The Psalmist praises God who planted the cedars of Lebanon. If he had been in Kerala, he'd have spoken of coconut trees and cardamon plants. (Psalm 104:16)



The universal vocation of creation and human beings is to praise God.



We are representatives of the creation (which cannot speak) in praising God.



Natural calamities are not God's punishment, as some think. If they were, the world would have been destroyed long, long ago!

ON THE PATH ARE THE CALLED



The monastic vocation is the root vacation, the mother of all vocations.



Why was I chosen from my brothers and sisters to be a monk? The grace of God, of course.



The monk should endeavour to ‘draw near to God and recount His wonders’. (Psalm 73:28)



It is the monk himself who has to take the initiative to know himself.



Poverty of spirit helps a monk to control instability of the spirit and to cultivate recollection.



The monk should not seek ‘ready-made’ solutions. His way is the tedium of hard work.



Monks need wisdom, that is, an intellect permeated by the Holy Spirit.



Monastic spirituality is not reciting the mysteries but living them.



We should not think of the monastery as a place that guarantees a passage to heaven.



A monk’s ‘weekend’ is not for enjoyment, but for renewing and strengthening his commitment.

✿ 'Agricultural work' must take place at the level of the spirit too.

✿ The monk's 'beauty parlour' is a healthy interior life.

✿ Monastic life is a continual renewal of our body, mind and soul. Every day must be a new day for a spiritual seeker.



INTERIOR LIFE



Observances without interiority are like bones without flesh.



A little child is forced by its mother to pray. As prayer progresses, it prays freely in the Spirit.



Everyday, we should spend time in silence, ‘alone with The Alone’, to become aware of what we are, our relation with Jesus, and to check whether Jesus is alive in us.



Silence helps us to share God with those who come to us.



Try to create a rhythm of life that is not too frequently disturbed. It will lead you to a recollected attitude.



Just as a body needs meals, the heart needs times of silence.



The tendency in a monk to accumulate things shows a lack of interiority.



Prayer is a priority to be acquired and preserved.



Our bodies should be the means of prayer and not the end.



Do not have some kind of blind faith in a special way of meditation.



We should progress from ‘We pray to Christ’ to ‘Christ prays in us’.



Interior prayer helps us to ‘digest’ community prayer and leads to nourishment and transfiguration.



In personal prayer, we should discard all other matters connected with ourselves and speak heart-to-heart with the Lord. When we speak to a friend, we don’t let other distractions come between us.



Sometimes, a small phrase like ‘Seek His face’ is enough to inspire us to prayer.

A MINISTRY OF PRAYER



Ours is a spiritual ministry, a ministry of prayer.



Monks ought to relate their lives to their prayers, or else they will be living a divided life. ...The salvific Mysteries which we celebrate over the liturgical year may be called the 'monastic rosary'.



We must 'link together' our sessions of community prayer with 'chains' of personal meditation.



Prayer, meditation and surrender to God are necessary to be able to accept just or unjust accusations without retaliation.



During community prayer, it is better to listen with your heart than with your mind.



Rather than complain about external noise during spiritual reading, a monk should try to immerse himself in what he is reading.



Writing about contemplation rather than doing it is a deviation.



Congregations of contemplatives are 'prayer-organs' in the Body of Christ.



Our prayer services are in danger of becoming formalities if not enriched, supported and extended by personal prayer.



Lectio Divina* is an asceticism of the mind that opens the heart to the presence of God
(* *Lectio Divina* = reading in a spiritual and meditative manner; *asceticism* = self-discipline, Ed)



LOVE OF BROTHERS



Our monastic vows are not bonds, but links.



The spontaneity of confessing one's sins to each other* is lost by secret confession. (* *Letter of St. James 5:16*)



The particularity of monastic life is that it seeks the perfection of charity. Monks have no 'secondary aim'.



We are in a 'school of love', not in a '10 + 2' school. Our 'syllabus' is Jesus Christ. We spend our whole lives in this school trying to become like Him. We should always have the attitude of learners. When we fail, do not remain in that condition, but be ready to learn afresh.



There is no joy in the community when everyone holds on to his position.



Each member of the community should have the mentality of a family member with the responsibility that it entails, and not a clerk with a fixed job.



Contemplatives should not consider their vocation of 'love of God' to be superior to the vocation of 'love of brothers', because they are

mysteriously connected with each other and that is what Jesus taught us.



Isolation from the community, even for a good cause, may lead to malpractices.



A monk's love must be universal, yet it should not lead to separation from his community.



Love in community depends on mutual obedience. But mutual obedience can occur only with humility. ...A good result of knowing ourselves is that we become living and life-giving members of the community.



Bliss is what we experience in heaven during the 'satsang*' presided by God! (* *fellowship of good people in search of truth. Ed*)

CREATING AND CONSERVING A COMMUNITY



Monastic community is not a business economy but a sharing economy. My experience in life is that the more you give, the more you'll receive.



When there is very systematic human organisation, it is difficult to be led by the Spirit. A balance should be established between the two.



Unanimity is our aim, not uniformity.



It is the spirit of the Rule* that should inspire us, not the letter.



Putting too much accent on the time-table runs the risk of extinguishing the inspiration of God from within us. During our early years in the monastery, we should develop a sensitivity to this inner call to prayer. Listen to the inner voice, or it may go out.



History shows that financial success brings a decline in spiritual standards. So, I wish that we remain small and poor.



Smaller groups are better in creating purity of spirit.



It is inconvenient not to have modern gadgets. But we must bear this inconvenience as part of our poverty.



The reading of the Rule* should be an occasion to renew our vocation, prayer, and community life.



Ideally, the community should come above the Rule* and the Abbot. The Abbot's job is to interpret the Rule for the community.



Monastic life is a life at par with that of the angels, prophets, apostles, the church of Jerusalem and martyrs.



The human rights movement is based on a 'rational spirituality'.



We are much too restricted in our concern for our order, our rite, our ashram. We are not concerned enough for the mystical body of Christ.

(*Rule is of St. Benedict, the classic manual for monks in the West dating from the 6th century in Italy. Ed)

FORMATION AND GROWTH



The purpose of formation is to make one grow in prayer, love of God and fraternal love.



We will advance if we are sincere students.



The aim of formation is to improve the quality of community life.



The accent given to intellectual formation these days could make it difficult for grace to enter the heart. Without being open to grace, which is the real agent of formation, no amount of academic formation will do any good.



Meditating on the Rule* and gaining personal understanding of it is more important than reading a commentary.



Remembrance of my ‘earnest beginnings’ in the noviciate still helps me to renew myself.

*(*Rule is of St. Benedict, the classic manual for monks in the West dating from the 6th century in Italy. Ed)*

TRAINING, LEADERSHIP AND AUTHORITY



Today's religious training does not lay enough stress on 'setting the heart on things above'*. Instead, more importance is given to 'practical' things. (**St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:1*)



By teaching, even teachers themselves come to a new awareness of the things they teach.



Teachers should not impose their ideas on the students; rather, each should be allowed to absorb what suits him best.



It is useless to impose something which the candidate, by his very nature, finds impossible to assimilate.



The core of the monastic curriculum is Sacred Scripture.



A spiritual father is one who helps us to know ourselves and to enter into our heart.



The Abbot should not use his authority to try to make somebody do something for which there is no seed (by the Spirit) in that person.



A superior should be an 'Abba' and efficiency of administration should not be the first criterion in choosing him.



The Abbot should be a father who rejoices and suffers with his family rather than a 'boss'.



Don Anselm le Bail, my former Abbot, and Mar Athanasios were two people who strengthened me and supported me. They were, in a way, like the two walking sticks which I carry around with me.



CONVERSION IS ONGOING



Monks should seek an ongoing conversion.



Not being able to exercise his talents is a part of the daily crucifixion of the monk.



There is a danger of compunction growing lukewarm once we join the monastery. If this happens, the results of compunction, which are conversion and renunciation, also grow cold. Then we start trying to acquire better things for ourselves instead of renouncing them. If such a backslide occurs, go back to the basics.



Malayalees are good in zeal for God, obedience, and community relations, but not so good in accepting humiliations.



Monks who live in a community are an army of brothers engaged in Spiritual warfare.



Just as we pick pieces of rice off the floor and wipe it while serving food, we should detect and remove minute flaws from our inner lives by confession.



A monk should always examine himself to see whether he has sinned against poverty.



Defects of character of behaviour have to be rooted out in the early stages of the monastic life. At a later stage, it is better to bear them patiently. This is a difficult thing to do, and can be learnt only slowly.



POVERTY AND RENUNCIATION



We must maintain a spirit of renunciation throughout our monastic life.



It is the mission of the monk to manifest renunciation to the world.



Attaining spiritual poverty is harder than just being poor.



The monk flees not only from cinema-halls and liquor-shops, but also from inner restlessness, dissatisfaction and inattention to the Divine will.



Hardships are part of monastic life. Towards the end, when we are no longer attracted by anything but eternal life, these hardships became enjoyable.



A good part of asceticism consists in guarding the heart from this attachment or that. The aim of the asceticism of monks, then, is to set them free.



The Church rules on fasting have been liberalised. Monks should balance this by a stricter self-discipline as regards eating.



A monk should strive to heal his instinct of acquiring property. Rather, he should try to

acquire things which will help him to grow in
monastic virtues.



OBEDIENCE AND HUMILITY



Obedience and humility are like twins. The former is more visible, the latter interior.



Obedience, like the Rupee, is being devalued these days.



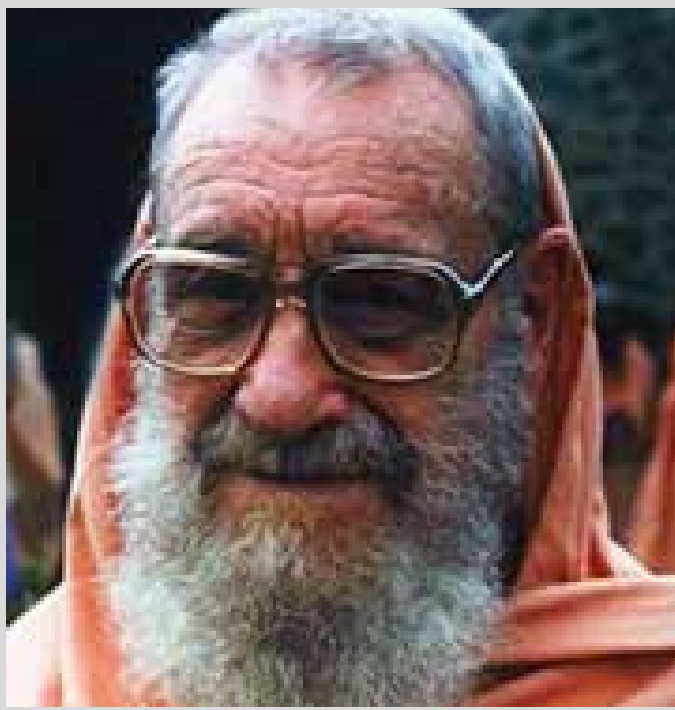
Obedience should be prompt and with understanding, not literal or servile.



In my life-time, I've seen the elements of 'human rights' creeping into obedience. This is against the spirit of St. Benedict who stresses that it is to God that obedience is given.



There is a 'relationship of obedience' with our brothers when we love them. This mutual obedience is typical of Benedictine spirituality and is one of the highest qualities in the good zeal of a monk.



FR. FRANCIS ACHARYA OCSO
(17.01.1912 - † 31.01.2002)



KURISUMALA
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Fr. Francis Acharya (OCSO), well-known in India monastic circles as one of the forerunners of the Christian Ashram Movement, crossed over to the Promised Land on January 31, 2002. His life, a saga which began on the 17th of January, 1912, in Belgium, the land of Missionaries, came to an end in India, the abode of Maharshis. He was ninety, “Our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong” says the psalmist (Ps. 90:10). “Ninety for those who are stronger,” one is tempted to add! A true Indian sannyasi with a multi-faceted personality, he was “still bearing fruit when old, still full of sap, still green” (Ps. 92:14).